

On Being Homosexual
by
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There is a saying in the gay community, "A black child is born into a black family and is shown the ropes of how to navigate in a hostile white world but a gay child is born alone into the enemy camp and quickly learns how to hide in order to escape persecution."

I grew up in a conservative Catholic family, believing in God, patriotism, and the forgiveness trespasses. I also grew up hearing the snickers, tones of disgust, and whispered condemnations of, "those perverts," "Queers," "Fag," "Pansy," and "Dyke. Those words were never used in our house, but I certainly heard them outside of the house and often from the front porch.

When I was about seven, my older sister and I were fighting over a swing in the backyard and I yelled, "You queer!" Suddenly, the back door banged open, there stood my mother in her cotton house dress with wet arms, a dish towel over her shoulder and a look of shock, fear and horror on her face. My sister and I froze, not sure what was happening. Mom came charging out of the kitchen, grabbed me by the back of the neck, yanked me off the swing, dragged me inside the house and washed my mouth out with soap, "If I ever hear you say that word again I'm going to beat you till you bleed!" I was dumbfounded. I had no idea what queer meant and my mother refused to tell me but obviously it was an extremely powerful word. In spite of the foul taste in my mouth, I made a mental note to keep that word in my back pocket for future use.

When I was about ten years old I saw Audrey Hepburn, Shirley MacLaine, and James Garner in, "The Children's Hour." Being in love with Audrey Hepburn was as natural to me as breathing air so I was thrilled to see that this movie was about a woman who had the same feelings that I had for Audrey Hepburn. But when Shirley MacLaine killed herself in response to the callous and relentless persecution of a hateful young girl,

I was horrified. Three things got burned into my brain that day... That I liked girls. That people could do me great harm if they knew. And that killing yourself could be the only way out of the humiliation. I cried, cemented in my seat. Could anybody tell that I loved Audrey Hepburn? Does it show? (Keep quiet. Don't ask. Don't tell. Hide...)

According to the 1989 U.S. Department of Health Services Task Force on Teen Suicide, 1/3 of all teen suicides were by gay and lesbian teens. According to a 2005 GLSEN School Climate Survey, 75.4% of students hear remarks such as "faggot" or "dyke" frequently or often at school.

As an adult you are more aware of world views, water cooler conversations and the subtleties of tone and expression that do not escape your notice - as they are usually not meant to. You are bombarded daily by anti-gay remarks in music, on the news, in television programs, in political discourse, at work, in school, and at church. Having to endure ignorant people who look at you with either superiority, fear, or ridicule becomes a normal way of life. Statically, the lower the education a person has the less tolerant they are of homosexuals - I have not always found this to be true.

As most of us do, I hid in plain sight. I dated a football star, was a Prom Queen candidate, voted Most Talented, and was a Jesus Freak - what charismatic Christians were referred to in the 1970's. Until I was in my early twenties I never knew or even saw a lesbian or gay person living an open, dignified life. As far as I knew, there WAS no such person. I was taught that homosexuals were evil, sneaky, strange, abnormal creatures who lived only to have bizarre sex. That God hated them more than he hated any other sinner. That gay men wanted to become women - but hated women - and that lesbian women wanted to become men - but hated men. They were void of ethics, morals, or self-restraint and preyed on young children. Homosexuals were something to be afraid of. Something that I should never associate with and, certainly, *something* I should never ever become.

I had ethics. I was a good person of faith. Whatever was going on inside of me wasn't homosexuality. It couldn't be. I

wasn't like "those people," I was a good person with high morals who God loved and if I knew anything, I knew *that*.

Being in Christian ministry, you quickly learn the high cost of telling the truth about any feelings, actions, or thoughts that contradict the expectation of what was acceptable. It took years before I could come to terms with my sexuality. The church which had once celebrated me as a gifted leader would now distance themselves from me, accusing me of being seduced by Satan and giving in to unnatural lustful temptations. But I wasn't tempted, I was celibate. And it wasn't the devil, it was the truth. I was a good, decent person AND I had just had, through prayer, the clear undeniable revelation that I was a lesbian.

The painful secret longings that I held for a dear friend would never become known to her but just the fact that I had admitted the feelings to myself and to God, finely had faced them.... That *I KNEW*... changed the course of my life.

In that moment of clarity every demonization of homosexuals that I had been a part of, every "counsel" to pressure someone to change that I had witnessed, every awkward avoidance of a gay person who had come to church became a guilt to me. I felt a rush of shame for my lack of compassion and love. I felt stupid for believing some fabricated notion of menace when, in fact, they were just people like me. The moment I realized that I was one of "Them," I knew that what I had been taught was a lie. I suddenly saw the hype, the hypocrisy, and the mean spirited treatment of gays as sin. I saw the church as weak in compassion and preoccupied with instilling fear in believers rather than courage and love. The common moral failings of the masses, each of them an abomination to God in scripture worthy of death, were glossed over as "human" while "protecting the children" from the perversions of gays and lesbians was used to raise hundreds of millions of dollars.

FBI statistics state that 98% of all child molesters and child predators are heterosexual men. HETEROSEXUAL! One in five boys and two in five girls will be sexually molested or raped before the age of 18. Forget gays, somebody needs to be

paying more attention to straight men. Especially when they are around children.

Interestingly, there is no ranking of sin in the Bible, institutionalized religion has done that for it's own purposes. The same law that condemns homosexuals to death also condemns kids to death who are disrespectful to their parents. In fact, the lineup for death in Leviticus is, first, the disrespectful kids, then adulterers, THEN homos. Remember, Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery is one of the Ten Commandments - it says nothing about homosexuality. Obviously, adultery is a bigger concern socially, especially when it comes to defending marriage. Where is the Amendment against it?

And there is only ONE sin that you can go to hell for in scripture, that is not accepting Jesus as Lord. The other sins are predictable problems of being human and fitting into social order. Sodomy is *any* non-procreative sex, not just anal sex. This specifically includes oral sex between opposite sex couples. Curiously, no one ever seems to mention that. No one believes that what *they* are doing is worthy of eternal condemnation but they sure don't hesitate to point their finger toward someone else who is doing the same thing. "There is none righteous, no, not one."

Until the Supreme Court ruled that all sodomy laws were illegal in *Lawrence v Texas* in 2004, in many states you could go to jail for a minimum of five years for having oral sex with an opposite sex person. It's not natural.

I left the church. I gave up the television show I hosted, gave up the theater group I directed, and stopped teaching my Bible Study. I needed to believe that God was bigger than my church's fears.. I knew all too well that the church was FULL of *practicing* sinners. Being a lesbian was not anything like their pious deceptions at appearing honorable. My homosexuality was truth refusing to be a deception, not deception appearing as truth. I was a lesbian through no intelligent design or failing of my own. Now what?

I had my first love affair with a woman when I was 28

years old. That first love lasted five years. I was still "in the closet" and so was my girlfriend. It is a very odd thing to have to keep your core affection a secret. I had no idea at how complicated it could get. The sacrifice of freedom in order to fit in slowly chips away at your sense of self, eroding your feelings of well being. It's hard to have a healthy relationship when you are always hiding it. I really hated it, but I was more afraid of what else might happen to my life if I found the courage to live openly.

I finally came out to my mother during my third love affair, when I was 40. Before I told her I was a lesbian, I was the apple of her eye: successful, adventurous, living a life that she admired but had never had the freedom to have herself. I was someone she could brag to her friends about. After saying, "Mom, I'm a lesbian," it only took seconds for all of that to change. The color drained from her face. She angrily shoved her dinner plate across the table and sneered, "What are you saying? That disgusts me! It makes me sick to my stomach! Why did you have to tell me that!? Why didn't you keep it to yourself!?" The fall from grace. (Keep quiet. Hide, for *their* sake. Don't tell)

In her defense, it didn't take my mother long to come around. Watching a PFLAG video of parents her same age with her same reaction and concerns really helped her feel less alone. She was ignorant, what could she possibly know about being gay except what she had been taught? Most of her friends now used the word queer casually, as if they were saying, "He's Italian." She had been raised to believe only the worse, in addition, Freud had said that it was all her fault. She sincerely lamented, "What did I ever do to you to make you this way?" It took a while for her to get that my sexual orientation had *nothing* to do with her. It wasn't a choice, it wasn't environmental, it just WAS. Like it or not.

Being homosexual is not a sex act, it's a natural orientation that cannot be changed. If a heterosexual person never has sex again in their life, are they any less heterosexual? If a homosexual person marries a person of the opposite sex in order to live a "normal" life, are they really now heterosexual? Of course not. They are performing, forcing themselves to live

abnormally in order to fit into a social expectation that, often, they don't even believe. It serves no one well.

I was fortunate enough to have had a childhood and teen years that I enjoyed. My faith got me through the ignorant meanness of others and, by the time I came out to my family, I was a self assured adult. For many gay and lesbian children, their experience is isolated, abusive, often violent, and sometimes deadly. "Love the sinner but hate the sin," is emotional violence masquerading as condescending kindness. To an already wounded spirit it just reeks of hypocrisy and oppression.

Visibility and the dialogue of equality has come from a paradigm shift in our individual moral certainty and our rejection of social condemnation. As we stand up and identify ourselves, society must deal with the reality of who homosexuals really are rather than the stereo-typed menace it has insisted on us identifying with.

The faces of our own loving children are causing us to rethink the "perverts" that we have always been taught to be afraid of. When kept in the closet the face-of-gay can be any repulsive, predatory, morally corrupt image that traditional warnings insist that it should be. But in the light of day, the *real* face-of-gay disrupts our notions of right and wrong and challenges our long held beliefs. That gay face looks like us, shares our values, asks us for it's allowance, and will someday parent our grandchildren.

Why do we cling to and protect irrational fears more than we fight for our gay children's prosperity and well being in society? There is so much sexism associated with homosexuality that it is a powerful reflection of the status of women in society. When the worse thing that you can call a little boy is that he is like a girl, something is seriously wrong. When femininity is only defined by what appeals to men then we are saying that our value as women is only measured in relationship to what is desirable to men. A woman's identity, at it's core, has nothing to do with another person, male or female. SHE decides what it means to be a woman, not someone else, and certainly not a man. What could he possibly know about it?

The mysteries of human sexuality have always been a taboo subject kept at arms length. Segregated into very strict compartments of acceptable behavior, sparse knowledge, and muted conversations dictated by the majority's ideal and that ideal is all about control.

Interestingly, the majority has come into it's own cautious and disturbing breakdown of ideal behavior. The most popular church leaders sound and act like politicians rather than spiritual shepherds. Money and sex scandals abound, marriages are at best a 50/50 gamble, mega-churches require hundreds of millions of dollars in order to "do good," and corporate greed runs amuck. "I'm right and you're wrong," attitudes are pervasive in believers today. The loving grace of faith is rarely ever glimpsed by those of us at the receiving end of condemnations. Conservatives seem to care much more about forcing unbelievers into an unholy submission by law rather than to entreat them by example into a true faith. Drive through conversions for a drive through society.

That's not the Jesus I was taught. I was taught to serve those that are less fortunate. I was taught not to judge, that that was up to God because only God knew that person's suffering and how their story was going to end, I didn't. I only get to be in one small slice of it and my part is to do my best at being a decent person, at being kind in a violent, arrogant, and unforgiving world. Some times I am, some times I am not.

What I do know is that I will gladly face God to judge me, without fear or lament. I will not, however, let the public or the churches judge me. I am a citizen and I deserve what every citizen deserves, without reservation, without alteration. Who I love or who I want to have a fun weekend with is none of your business. Sweep your own porch and I'll sweep mine.

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